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ABSTRACT

Systematic human relations training can enhance interpersonal effectiveness, but student reaction to this type of training is mixed. In a study of students enrolled in systematic human relations training, two videotapes dealing with classroom discipline were created. One tape portrayed a non-facilitative interaction, while the other depicted a facilitative reaction. No significant differences were found in the students' perceptions of the helpfulness of either or both interactions. The results suggest that training groups may contain a negative minority who could change the climate of the training experience. This change could be counteracted by giving students an opportunity to learn to differentiate between facilitative and non-facilitative communication. Given an opportunity for experiential learning, students might learn to value facilitative communication. (JAC)

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# Student's Preference for a Human Relations Training Style of Interaction

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The research reported in this summary reflects a part of a dissertation accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph.D. degree by the University of Georgia. George M. Gazda, Ed.D., served as the major advisor. The author wishes to acknowledge Harry Davis, Medical College of Georgia, for his assistance with data analysis, and P. Kenneth Morse, Ph. D., Medical College of Georgia, for editorial assistance.

In 1957 Rogers stimulated extensive research in psychotherapy when he postulated that for total personality change to occur a necessary and sufficient condition was that the therapist offer empathic understanding, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. Rogers (1969) suggested that educators could benefit from studying the relationships between therapists and clients. Later Carkhuff, Berenson, and Pierce (1976) and Gazda, Asbury, Balzer, Childers, and Walters (1977) designed and published models of a systematic program to enable educators to become more effective communicators. Many publications from other authors are also available for those helping people who want to improve their interpersonal communication skills.

Systematic human relations training can enhance interpersonal effectiveness (Norton, 1972; Butler & Hansen, 1973; Lundleby & Zingle, 1975; Anthony & Hill, 1976; and Porter, 1977). Some studies have examined the influence of facilitative communication on teaching outcomes in both cognitive and behavioral domains (Christensen, 1969; Aspy, 1965; Aspy & Hadlock, 1967; Stoffer, 1970; Aspy & Roebuck, 1972; Boak & Conklin, 1975; Harbach & Asbury, 1976; and Walter, 1977). These researchers have found that more cognitive and behavioral gains occurred under facilitative conditions than under non-facilitative conditions. Moreover, reports based on post-training evaluations indicate that students respond favorably toward training (Asbury & Costantino, 1972; Anthony & Hill, 1976; and Huyck, 1980).

Students' reactions toward human relations training differ. Certainly, a percentage of students receiving training do respond positively; however, there is also a percentage of students who react negatively. This negative response, as well as the positive response, has been noticeable in training groups conducted by this writer during the past seven years.

These groups have included undergraduate students preparing for work in teaching, social work, nursing, child care, law and security, and dental hygiene. Furthermore, this negative reaction has been experienced by other trainers. Many explanations have been offered to account for the negative reaction of some students. These explanations include the inexperience of the trainer, the lack of enthusiasm or commitment of the trainer, boring training regimes, and the lack of importance attributed to this training experience by students. Perhaps a key variable is the reaction that students have when they are exposed to facilitative communication and, then, required to respond in this same manner. This is a key because training programs appear to be based on the assumption that students want to be facilitative communicators. For example, Carkhuff's model initially requires students to attend to the helpee, and then to respond to the helpee's cognitive and affective world. If there are students who perceive this manner of communicating to be unhelpful, they are not given an opportunity to explore. Rather, in order to succeed they must work toward the attending, responding, personalizing, and initiating objectives established in the program. A search of the literature failed to find any studies which attempted to assess students' predispositions toward human relations training at the beginning of training.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of students, prior to training, toward a style of interaction that is advocated by systematic human relations trainers. Do students perceive a facilitative approach to problem-solving as helpful? Do students perceive a non-facilitative approach to problem-solving as helpful? Which style is perceived as being more helpful? Are there any effects due to sex, class standing, or the school level at which students are preparing to teach?

## METHODOLOGY

Two videotapes were created, each focusing on the same problem, classroom discipline, and each taking the same amount of time to resolve the problem. Videotape A portrayed a non-facilitative interaction (NFIS), that is, the helping person (Jeff) worked from his biases and perceptions and gave reassurances and advice that were not based on a demonstrated understanding of the helpee's (Dave) situation. Videotape B portrayed a facilitative interaction (FIS). The helper responded to the helpee, demonstrating an understanding of the helpee's situation, both affectively and cognitively. Consequently, the helpee recognized his contribution to the problem and his weakness, and he defined a personalized goal. Three independent raters verified Videotape A (NFIS) as reflecting a non-facilitative style and Videotape B (FIS) as reflecting a facilitative style.

The sample consisted of all the students ($n$ = 313) enrolled in systematic human relations training in the academic year 1979-80, at the College of Education, University of Georgia (70 sophomores, 165 juniors, 44 seniors, 4 graduate students, 30 unknown). There were 257 females, 55 males, and one unknown; 140 students were preparing to teach at the elementary school level, 35 middle school level, and 138 secondary school level. Most students were Georgia residents, and the mean age was 21 years.

Testing was administered at the beginning of the Fall, Winter, and Spring Quarters. At registration students enroll in one of the sections of EFN 303, Foundations of Education, of which communication skills training is a component. This course is offered at the secondary, middle, and elementary school levels. When students reported for their first training experience, they were randomly assigned to one of three groups. Students in Group I viewed Videotape A (NFIS), those in Group II viewed Videotape B (FIS), and those in Group III viewed both videotapes. To control for order effect, half of the Group III's watched in the order A then B, half in the order B then A.

After watching the videotape(s) students responded to a questionnaire. Students in Groups I and II were asked to indicate whether or not they found the helping person, Jeff, who was identified by name, to be helpful or not. They were also give the opportunity to explain their decisions. Students in Group III were asked to indicate whether or not they perceived Jeff to be helpful in Videotape A (NFIS), and whether or not they perceived Jeff to be helpful in Videotape B (FIS). Students responded to these two questions after seeing both videotapes. Also they were asked to indicate in which videotape they perceived Jeff to be more helpful. Again students were given an opportunity to explain their decisions.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data were analyzed initially by means of the FUNCAT procedure in the Statistical Analysis System (Barr, Goodnight, & Sall, 1979). This procedure, based on the log linear model advocated by Grizzle, Starmer, and Koch (19[illegible]), is a nominal level analog to analysis of variance and was used to examine main and interaction effects. The main effects were (1) sex, (2) class standing (sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate level), (3) school level at which students were preparing to teach (elementary, middle, and secondary), and (4) treatment. Under treatment there were four conditions. Some students watched Videotape A (NFIS) only, some Videotape B (FIS) only, some A followed by B, and some B followed by A. Analysis of the interactions was restricted to two-way interactions. No significant main or interaction effects were found ($p < .05$).

To maximize sample size, data were then collapsed across sex, class standing, school level, and treatment and included responses previously listed as missing values. A test of significance of proportion (vs. $\mu = .5$) was

used to analyze data relative to the questions concerning the helpfulness of the helper in Videotape A and in Videotape B. A test for significance of difference between two proportions was used for the data corresponding to the question of which style was more helpful. Of the 208 students who viewed Videotape A, 63% perceived this non-facilitative style to be helpful ($p < .001$). Of the 207 students who viewed Videotape B, 80% perceived this facilitative style to be helpful ($p < .001$). One hundred and one students watched both videotapes, and 68% perceived the facilitative style to be more helpful ($p < .001$).

## DISCUSSION

The major purpose of this study was to explore the perception of students, before training, toward a style of interaction advocated by systematic human relations trainers. Existing training models are structured so that students/trainees move quickly into a learning phase. The model developed by Carkhuff, for example, begins with attending skills and then proceeds into responding, personalizing, and initiating skills. If students also share these same goals of communication, then systematic training could be very effective; if they do not, problems could emerge. How do students perceive this model prior to training?

Using a log linear model the researcher found no significant differences between males and females, among sophomores, juniors, seniors, and graduate students, and among students preparing to teach at the elementary, middle, or secondary school levels, in their perception of the helpfulness of facilitative and non-facilitative interaction. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in their perceptions of helpfulness among groups of students who watched the facilitative interaction only, the non-facilitative interaction

only, or both interactions (regardless of order). Sixty-three percent of the students who watched the non-facilitative interaction found it to be helpful, and 80.2% found the facilitative interaction to be helpful. Of the students who watched both interactions, 31.7% selected the non-facilitative style as being more helpful. There was no significant difference between the groups who watched the videotapes in the order A then B and the groups in the B then A order.

Students who perceived the non-facilitative style as helpful commented on the soundness or usefulness of the advice, the understanding and genuineness demonstrated by the helper, the expertise demonstrated by the helper, and the satisfaction of the helpee. Other supporters echoed the need for authoritarian control and saw this as part of the helper's solution. Those students who perceived the non-facilitative style as not helpful, with the exception of two students, cited disagreement with the helper's advice. Had these students agreed with the advice, would they have perceived this non-facilitative style to be helpful? The two students mentioned as exceptions were critical of the process used by the helper .

Students who perceived the facilitative style as being helpful commented upon the benefit of being encouraged to think for oneself and of needing people who listen and understand. Negative comments focused on the reflective style of the helper which students describe as "just repeating what Dave said".

Students who watched both videotapes made comments similar to those of students who had seen only one videotape. In addition, students who selected the facilitative style as more helpful stated the importance of being able to "make your own decision" and "solve your own problems". Some thought that the advice presented in the non-facilitative style blocked the development of effective teaching skills. Supporters of the non-facilitative style again pointed out the uselessness of the "repeating" quality of the helper's

responses, and stressed the importance of receiving advice. Some students believed that the classroom discipline problem was student-owned and, therefore, suggested that the students should change. They apparently resented the idea of any teacher-ownership and rejected the solution suggestive of teacher change.

What are the implications for teaching human relations skills using systematic training models? Approximately one-third of the students who viewed both videotapes indicated that the non-facilitative approach was more helpful than the facilitative approach, and one-fifth of the students who watched the facilitative approach indicated that it was not a helpful approach. Therefore, it is likely that training groups will contain at least a negative minority who could change the climate of the training experience. This change could be counteracted by adding an exploratory component to training. In this phase students could learn to differentiate between facilitative and non-facilitative communication. They could experience, personally or vicariously, the consequences of facilitative and non-facilitative communication. Given an opportunity for experiential learning, perhaps more students will respond to facilitative communication and possibly value this style.

Adding a component would require additional training time. An effort seems warranted to determine what time frame is sufficient. In fact it might be worthwhile to investigate the effects of alternative training formats. What type of training experience, with which students, under which conditions, with which trainers produces what levels of cognitive and affective outcomes?

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